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DISSERTATION

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ON

ANECDOTES;

BY THE AUTHOR OF

CURIOSITIES OF LITERATURE.

L O N D O N:

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1793.



P R E F A C E.

THE art of preface-writing is, perhaps, the art of concealing the anxiety of an author. There are some works which require nor preface nor anxiety : the present trifle merits neither ; yet I cannot refrain from bestowing on it a little of both.

A Dissertation demands (and I confess it) a certain systematical regularity, which is above me. But a Dissertation on Anecdotes is a thing so eccentric, that if, on the whole,

my pages are not found to weary the reader, it is just that he should have the candour not to complain, if it does not precisely answer the idea he may form of a Dissertation.

I am even desirous, that this Essay may not be considered as destitute of connection, because at the first glance it may thus appear. The work consists not of a mere mass of loose anecdotes; these are given as sketches of the manner in which various topics may be conducted; and elucidate those reflections on the nature of anecdotes, which, if they shall be found to be pertinent, is all of which I am solicitous. In my notes, I have taken a greater freedom of discussion; but this has been (to use the language of a master in literary composition) 'with the honest desire of giving useful pleasure.'

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There is a singularity respecting the word *Anecdote*, which it is not here improper to notice. Anecdotes is an appellation given by scholars to Mss. which they discovered in libraries, and afterwards published. This term is strictly according to its Grecian derivation, *ανεκδοτα*, i. e. things not yet published. Thus Cicero, as Moreri observes, gave the name of Anecdote to a work which he had not yet published.

We have borrowed the use of this word, in its ordinary signification, from the French, who employ it for any interesting circumstance. In this sense Varillas published *Anecdotes of the family of the Medicis*.

Johnson has imperfectly defined the word, by saying, that, 'It is now used after the
I ' French

French for a *biographical incident*; a minute passage of *private life*.' This confines its signification merely to *biography*; but anecdotes are susceptible of a more enlarged application. This word is more justly defined in the Cyclopædia, 'a term which (now) denotes a relation of detached and interesting particulars.' We give *anecdotes* of the art as well as the Artist; of the war as well as the General; of the nation as well as of the Monarch.

I conclude by observing, that if a series of anecdotes shall be found capable of illustrating any individual topic, we yet want a collection of such anecdotes. A writer for this purpose should unite to the ardour of research, a solid judgment and a correct taste. Yet, with all these qualifications, I
am

P R E F A C E.

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am fearful that the world would be more inclined to commend his industry, than distinguish his talents. It is, therefore, not probable, that a man of genius will condescend to arrange anecdotes; and we must lament, that the fastidiousness of superficial minds deters the ingenious student from giving the world literary speculations, the most instructive, and the most delightful,

September 25, 1793.

A DIS-

PREFACE

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London 1793

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A
DISSERTATION
ON
ANECDOTES.

A Writer of periodical criticism*, has given some observations on ANECDOTES; which, because they echo the voice of several men of letters, it may not be improper to investigate. The opinions of our critic, to me, appear erroneous, because they regard anecdotes as only agreeable objects of literary amusement. A writer should correct others; or correct himself: I therefore hazard this essay. A dry dissertation on anecdotes appears thorny; let us try if we cannot discover blossoms and flowers.

The critic says, 'Anecdotes are among the luxuries of literature;' and he is 'fearful that the mind should be accustomed to them, and reject severer diet.' I rejoice,

* The British Critic for July 1793, p. 324.

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however,

however, to be informed, in the same paragraph, that, ' they stimulate the appetite ' for reading, and create it where deficient.' This logic is not in the happiest manner of Bayle.

I will not deny that anecdotes are to be placed among literary luxuries. The refinement of a nation influences the genius of its literature ; we now require not only a solid repast, but a delicious dessert. A physician, austere as Hippocrates, a critic, rigid as Aristotle, are alike inimical to our refreshments. We will not be fooled into their systems. We do not dismiss our fruits and our wines from our tables ; we eat, and our health remains unprejudiced. We read anecdotes with voluptuous delight ; nor is our science impaired, or our wit rendered less brilliant.

The day has past, when persevering dullness obtained the honours of literary eminence. A vigorous memory was then the only talent required in the scholar ; he was the greatest genius who read most. Our age does not think highly of those names, once so celebrated. Learning, in its present diffusion, will only please as it is found-
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ed on a solid judgment, and embellished by the graces of a fine taste*.

It is therefore not just to consider anecdotes merely as a source of entertainment, because they amuse; if it shall be found that they serve also for the purposes of utility, they will deserve to be classed higher in the scale of study than hitherto they have been.

All the world read anecdotes; but not many with reflection, and still fewer with taste. To most, one anecdote resembles another; a little unconnected story that is heard, that pleases, and is forgotten. Yet when anecdotes are not merely transcribed, but animated by judicious reflections, they recal others of a kindred nature: one suggests another; and the whole series is made to illustrate some topic that gratifies curiosity, or impresses on the mind some interesting conclusion in the affairs of human life. Like the concord of notes, one depends on the other, and the whole forms a perfect harmony.

Anecdotes
seldom read
with reflection.

* On this subject Scaliger has made a judicious observation. He says, 'If a person's *learning* is to be judged of by his *reading*, nobody can deny Eusebius the character of a learned man; but if he is to be esteemed learned, who has shewn *judgment* together with his *reading*, Eusebius is not such.'

We will take a review of some of those effects, which anecdotes appear capable of producing.

The most agreeable parts of History, consist in it's anecdotes.

History itself derives some of it's most agreeable instructions from a skilful introduction of anecdotes. We should not now dwell with anxiety on a dull chronicle of the reigns of monarchs; a parish register, might prove more interesting. We are not now solicitous of attending to battles, which have ceased to alarm; to sieges, which can destroy none of our towns; and to storms, which can never burst upon our shores. We turn with disgust from fictions told without the grace of fable, and from truths uninteresting as fables told without grace.* Our hearts have learnt to sympathise; and we consult the annals of history,

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* Romancers have existed in all nations, under the names of historians, from the notorious Geoffrey of Monmouth, to Jean le Maire, who in his Illustrations of Gaul, makes the French nation descend from the fugitive princes of Troy. This is not quite so marvellous, as the eccentric follies of several modern Irish antiquaries. Col. V..... has pushed his national researches as far back as the time of the deluge. Since he was so employed he might have gone further; for an old writer has even favoured us with the names of the *seven Irish Kings* who flourished *before Noah!*

Mr.

as a son and a brother would turn over his domestic memoirs. We read history, not to indulge the frivolous inquisitiveness of a dull antiquary, but to explore into the causes of the miseries and the prosperities of our country. We are more interested in the progress of the human mind, than in that of empires.

A Hearne would feel a frigid rapture, if he could discover the name of a Saxon monarch unrecorded in our annals; and of whom as little should remain, as of the doubtful bones of a Saxon dug out of a tumulus. Such are his anecdotes!—A Hume is only interested with those characters, who have exerted themselves in the cause of humanity, and with those incidents, which have subverted or established the felicities of a people*.

Hence

Mr. T. Warton, in his observations on the Faëry Queen, notices one of Geoffrey's fables. This monk, in his account of the original state of Albion has these words, 'Erat tunc nomen insulæ Albion quæ a nemine nisi a *paucis gigantibus* inhabitabatur.' A *few giants*, in that historian's opinion, were but of little consideration.

* There will always be antiquaries, who will solace themselves with the hope, that dull industry will compensate for a total want of the energy of genius. Such will not discern when minute enquiry dwindles into frivolous inutility. The

Anecdotes
serve as ma-
terials for
the history
of manners.

Hence the history of manners has become the prime object of the researches of philosophers. How is this prominent feature in history to be depicted? The artist must not here draw at fancy, a beautiful or fantastical line. He must regard his object with minute attention, and he must reflect long on a thousand little strokes, which are to give the faithful resemblance. The historian must

elegance and the reflection of Hume, are regarded with contempt by these unenlightened students; and they condemn the philosopher, precisely for what he is most to be commended; for not wasting his pages on researches, that resemble conjectures, into our Saxon annals, which, if they could be known with accuracy, would not be more interesting than the annals of the Abyssinians, over which many a reader of taste has groaned in the bulky volumes of Mr. Bruce. But on the subject of such remote antiquities, I shall transcribe a conversation recorded by Mr. Boswel, apologizing for quoting a book which is in the hands of every one. On our antiquarian researches, Johnson said, 'All that is really known of the ancient state of Britain, is contained in a few pages. We can know no more than what the old writers have told us; yet what large books have we upon it, the whole of which, excepting such parts as are taken from those old writers, is all a dream, such as Whitaker's Manchester.—I have heard Henry's history of Great Britain well spoken of; I am told it is carried on in separate divisions, as the civil, the military, the religious history; I wish much to have one branch well done, and that is *the history of manners*, of common life.' Robertson answered, 'Henry should have applied his attention to that *alone*, which is enough for any man.' Vol. iii. p. 122.

affiduously

assiduously arrange the minute anecdotes of the age he examines; he must oftener have recourse to the diaries of individuals, than to the archives of a nation. Nothing, however minute, must escape his research, though every thing is not to be reported *.

To inform the world, that in the xvith Century, bishops only were permitted the use of silk; that princes and princesses only had the prerogative of wearing scarlet clothes either of silk or of wool; and that only

Various
anecdotes
illustrating
the history
of manners.

* It must be confessed, that our antiquarian studies begin to rank high in the mind of the philosopher. They seem to be directed to the illustration, not merely of obliterated inscriptions, but of ancient manners. The sepulchral monuments of Mr. Gough, form a splendid work of this kind, which has deservedly gained their author the distinguished title of the English Montfaucon. We may observe of what importance, in this interesting topic, are the memorandums of an individual, from the recovery of the book of the Master of the Revels, which Mr. Malone has been so fortunate as to obtain. We enter more fully into the genius of those times, from such publications, than from the superficial accounts and fanciful conjectures of any modern writer. He who would penetrate further into these amusing researches, must apply himself to a close examination of those 200 4to volumes of old plays which Mr. Garrick has deposited in the British Museum; to a patient perusal of innumerable MSS; and to the collecting matter from the printed books of the times. The prospect looks boundless and dreary; it appears at a distance a dark forest; yet when once explored with ardour, it wants not occasional sunshine to cheer us and vernal banks to repose on.

princes and bishops had a right to wear shoes made of silk;—such anecdotes would appear trivial in the hands of a mere antiquary; but they become important when touched by a philosophical historian. These little particulars awaken, in the mind of Voltaire, an admirable reflection: he says, “All these sumptuary laws only shew, that the government of these times had not always great objects in their view; and that it appeared easier for ministers to proscribe, than to encourage industry.”

Had I to sketch the situation of the Jews in the ninth century, and to exhibit at the same time the character of that age of bigotry, could I do it more effectually than by the following anecdote, which a learned friend (who will one day be celebrated for his historical researches) discovered in some manuscript records?

A jew, of Rouen in Normandy, sells a house to a christian inhabitant of that city. After some time of residence, a storm happens, lightning falls on the house, and does considerable damage. The christian, unenlightened, villainous, and pious, cites the trembling descendant of Israel into court

court for *damages*. His eloquent counsellor hurls an admirable philippic against this detestable nation of heretics, and concludes by proving, that it was owing to this house having been the interdicted property of an Israelite, that a thunderbolt fell upon the roof. The judges (as it may be supposed) were not long in terminating this suit. They decreed that God had damaged this house as a mark of his vengeance against the property of a jew, and that therefore it was just the repairs should be at his cost.

Perhaps it is to be acknowledged, that the judges were merciful; and the jew fortunate. To be condemned to rebuild a house, is better than to be burnt with some of its old wood.

I shall add one more instance which may prove, that it is alone by anecdotes the genius of an age or nation is thoroughly to be understood.

The French nation, before their singular revolution, displayed a splendid scene of refinement, of luxury, and of frivolity, which perhaps was never yet presented to the eye of the philosopher, on this theatre of the world. In reading the secret memoirs of
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that country (a scandalous chronicle, which was carried on for above thirty years) one gathers many curious particulars, which can only be found in these fugitive leaves. Religion was forbidden them by the philosophers, and politics by the government. They exhausted their active and volatile genius, on the objects of taste; taste, that they contrived should be the image of both, for it had it's heresies, and it's parties. The theatre, and the bookseller's shop; formed the great concerns of the Parisian. Voltaire was more to be dreaded, than the prime minister; and Mad. Clairon (their celebrated actress) appears to have enjoyed the sovereignty of Paris.

Sometimes we observe, that a publication ferments the town for a week; the minister sends the author to the Bastille for a month: the book is publicly burnt, forbidden to be sold, and every body has it by heart. The police sometimes is so rigid as to put an embargo on all Mss.; to imprison censors of books because they suffered passages to be printed which appear to the court of an offensive nature; in a word, several printers are compelled to sell their founts, and a dismal

mal barrenness appears in the literature of France.

Sometimes we perceive theatrical representations to be the objects of ministerial vengeance. They forbid a particular play, whose subject might be applicable to the moment; or even a particular passage of a play, which the malicious actor pronounced with emphasis. I give an instance of the latter, in the note underneath.*

But it is not my intention to fill up an elaborate picture of the French nation at these moments; that probably will soon occupy

* On the 19th February, 1762, in playing *Tancred*, Mad. Clairon, when she came to these verses,

‘ On depouille Tancrede, on l’exile, on l’outrage, —
 ‘ C’est le sort d’un Heros d’être persecuté —
 ‘ Tout son-parti se tait; qui fera son appui ?
 ‘ Sa gloire —
 ‘ Un Heros qu’on opprime attendrit tous les cœurs —’

This sublime actress made such inflexions of her voice, so noble and so penetrating, that all the audience recollected the event of that day, which was a lettre de cachet the Marquis de Broglie had received. His name flew from mouth to mouth (says my reporter) and the representation was frequently interrupted by the loud applauses which were continually renewed.

The next day the house was forbidden to act the tragedy of *Tancred*, in consequence of what had passed on the preceding representation.

copy the contemplation of men of able talents.

But I would give one striking example of the national character at this period; and for this purpose I employ the following anecdotes.

Molé, a favourite actor, falls ill, and is confined to his chamber; when this is announced from the stage, the gaiety of Paris suddenly lours with gloom. The next day his door is besieged by enquiring crouds; his health is the conversation of all companies. It appeared as if Scipio lay confined, and the virtuous Romans passed their hours in melancholy anxiety, for the life of their protector. The physicians find Molé in an exhausted state, and prescribe a free use of wine. This prescription is soon known in the circles at Paris; and Molé finds two thousand bottles of the finest Burgundy sent to his house from various quarters. Molé at length recovers; all Paris rejoices, and rushes to his benefit. Such was the public ardour, that it produced him the amazing sum of 24,000 livres. Molé gratefully receives the valuable tribute of their applause; he was in debt, and the benefit formed all his

his fortune. How then does Molé apply his 24,000 livres? An Englishman would have purchased an annuity, or perhaps have paid his debts. Molé runs to the jeweller, takes its amount in brilliants, and gives them to his mistress, who boasts that she wears all the honours of the public.

This serves to display at once the frivolity of the nation, and of the individual. All Paris is concerned for the indisposition of an actor, and all terminates in giving diamonds to an impudent brunette.

Of the eminent personages in history, we have many differing characters. We know well how the object will appear when seen through the coloured telescope of a prejudiced historian. The most impartial may not always be successful in his delineations. An intelligent reader frequently discovers *traits* which seem concealed. He does not perceive these faint touches in the broad canvases of the historian, but in those little portraits which have sometimes reached posterity. He acquires more knowledge of individuals by memoirs, than by histories. In histories there is a majesty, which keeps us distant from great men; in memoirs, there

Histories
compared
with me-
moirs.

there is a familiarity, which invites us to approach them. In histories, we appear only as one who joins the croud to see them pass; in memoirs, we are like concealed spies, who pause on every little circumstance, and note every little expression.

It is thus that such works as Plutarch's *Lives*, Froissart's *Chronicle*, the *Memoirs* of Comines and Brantome, Burnet's and Clarendon's *Histories* of their own Times, have ever allured curiosity, and gratified inquiry. There are indeed readers who, when they turn over the pages of history, indulge in the marvellous of romance. A visionary perfection darts from their imagination, and throws around a brilliant delusion. Their heroes are, prince Arthurs; their Heroines, Unas; their Statesmen, Merlins. It must be confessed, that in the mode in which history is frequently composed, there are sufficient reasons to render such a system plausible. One can hardly meet with the most natural event in the histories of such writers as Tacitus, of Strada, and of Mariana, but these refined writers are for deriving it from some profound policy, or intricate deception. In
their

their studious leisure, it must have been with difficulty that they tortured their invention to such a stretch; an impossibility in those personages who acted in the tumult of affairs, and concussion of public events *. The historian frequently seems ignorant of that haste, in which the most splendid actions are performed, and discovers a regular plot in the irregular combinations of fortune. Every statesman who comes down to us as a Nestor, I doubt was not the sage

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* Crebillon the son, who sacrificed his talents on some licentious Romances, in his *Tanzai* and *Neadarne*, C. 4. has made a judicious reflection on readers of history. I snatch this flower thrown among ordures. He writes 'The reader of history passes his judgment on its heroes, not so much from what they ought to have done in the circumstances in which they appear before him, as from what he concludes they might have done. He puts himself calmly and seriously in their place; and, divested of the passions which fired them, clears or condemns them, according to the success of their enterprises: but does not once enquire whether the circumstances would allow them time to deliberate; or whether their impulses would permit them even to glance at reflection. Among the various classes of readers, very few examine incidents with judgment; and most who have abilities for this, are oftentimes very unjust.' I add a judicious observation of Patin, on this subject. 'The mysterious discovery of the designs of princes, renders a history valuable; but it must be founded on truth, and not on the imagination of an historian who affects continually to make a new discovery.'

we believe him to have been ; nor every general, the Achilles he appears. The most eminent personages are not so remotely removed from the level of ordinary humanity, as the vulgar conceive. Transcendant powers are rarely required ; tolerable abilities, placed conspicuously, appear to great advantage ; as a lighted torch held in the hand is too common an object to fix our attention, but that torch placed favourably on a hill, would excite our admiration. Who is persuaded of this truth, will be more inclined to search for the characters of eminent persons in their domestic privacies, than in their public audiences ; and would prefer the artless recitals of the valet de chambre of Charles I. to the elegant narrative of his apologist Hume.

An anecdote
reveals a
character.

A well-chosen anecdote frequently reveals a character, more happily than an elaborate delineation ; as a glance of lightning will sometimes discover what had escaped us in a full light. Some instances may enforce this observation.

Anecdotes
which dis-
cover the
characters
of eminent
men.

The character of Oliver Cromwell long exercised the historical talents of European writers. Some French academicians have drawn

drawn his character with admirable refinement; Gregorio Leti, amused with agreeable fictions; Raguenet tires with dry truths; at home, volumes on volumes have wearied curiosity. All these writers would persuade us, that he was an artful mixture of the politician and the hypocrite. A single anecdote leads us more into the genius of the man, than this multiplicity of volumes. When he is represented among some select friends, in a convivial hour, with a bottle in one hand, and bending under the table to search for the corkscrew, a confidential servant enters, and announces a body of 'the Elect.'—'Tell them'—says Cromwell in the language of fanaticism—'Tell them we are seeking for the Lord—These fools think (he continues, turning to his friends) 'that I am seeking for the Lord, while I am only seeking for the Corkscrew.'

Does not this little anecdote at once present us with the artifices of his politics, and the hypocrisy of his religion?

The anecdote of the death of the gallant Sidney, reveals, with a marvellous force, the genius of chivalry: that genius, which

was *valour* in the field, and *love* at court. The hand that lead through the graceful dance the beloved sovereign of his soul, while he was bleeding to death, could turn with a feeble, yet energetic power, the cruise of water from his pale and parched lips, to those of his humble companion expiring at his feet.

We are more acquainted with the character of Sir Thomas More, by his jocularities on the scaffold, than by some lives which are to be read of him.

I shall close this topic with some anecdotal sketches of several monarchs, who have formed epochas in the history of their nations.

We are delighted to attend Augustus amidst the embarrassing affairs of government, into his domestic recesses. To see him the preceptor of his son; to observe him at supper seated between Virgil and Horace, and to mark him with exquisite wit erase one of his own tragedies. Virgil was afflicted by an asthma, and Horace by a fistula lachrymalis. When Augustus was placed between them he used to say, not unpoetically, 'I am now between sighs
and

‘ and tears.’ This lover of the art, aspired to become an artist; he wrote a tragedy called Ajax; but he had the good sense to perceive, that if he was born to be an emperor, he was not to be a poet. One day he effaced with his sponge the whole tragedy; when it was enquired after, he wittily answered, ‘ Ajax is dead, he has swallowed his sponge;’ alluding to a mode of death practised by the Roman gladiators, who frequently in despair swallowed their sponges. These little anecdotes shew the literary dispositions of Augustus, whom perhaps (as other great monarchs who resemble him) a cruel system of politics alone had made a tyrant*.

Louis XIV. merits the love of posterity.

* I say politics alone compelled Augustus to sanguinary measures. We know that he would never cause enquiries to be made after the authors of certain papers which had been scattered in the senate, and which loaded him with calumnies. When Tiberius wondered at his indifference, this great monarch answered, ‘ You think like a young man. Let them speak ill of me, it is sufficient for me that I know they can do me none.’ Does this conduct of Augustus indicate him to have delighted in the effusion of human blood? When he had attained power, he shewed the most amiable disposition. It is said of him, in comparing the commencement of his reign with its close, it had been desirable, that he had never been emperor, or that he had never ceased to be emperor. Augustus is an eminent example of the force of the terrible genius of politics.

The genius of his people, not his own, inspired him with attempts inimical to the rights of mankind. When this monarch is deprived of that false glory which his adulators have thrown around him, he will appear to advantage, placed in the softer light of those hours, which he devoted to the society of the great men whom his splendid patronage had formed. Numerous anecdotes of this monarch, are eternal testimonies of his intellectual powers and his fine taste. He loved the conversations of Boileau and Racine. He was not a mere auditor of their works; he admired them with exquisite sensibility, and animadverted on them with just criticism. We know that he detected several errors in their works. The eye that could catch a Boileau and a Racine tripping, it must be confessed was of no ordinary quickness. Several of these royal conversations have been recorded. It is honourable for the satyrical bard, that he had the boldness frequently to speak his sentiments freely; and what is still more honourable, his majesty did not dislike his frankness. I give the reader one or two of those interesting anecdotes, which relate to these two poets.

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It is well known, that when Boileau read to his Majesty one of his epistles, in which are these fine verses, describing the Emperor Titus,

- ‘ Qui rendit de son joug l’univers amoureux ;
- ‘ Qu’on n’alla jamais voir, sans revenir heureux ;
- ‘ Qui soupiroit le soir, si sa main fortunée,
- ‘ N’avoit par ses bienfaits signalé la journée’—

his Majesty was enchanted, and made the poet repeat them thrice. At that moment, perhaps, he proposed Titus for his model ; such was the force of poetry ! The next day, he gave orders for the war ; such was the power of politics ! When the satiric bard, for the first time after the death of Racine, paid his respects to the king, Louis received him with affection. He sympathised in the loss ; and he added, in pulling out his watch, ‘ Remember, Boileau, I have an hour for you every week.’

I add one more anecdote, which brings us into his apartment. When the French Augustus was one day confined to his chamber, he sent for Racine. The poet read with grace ; and his Majesty asked him to take up some book. A life of Plutarch was pro-

posed. The king objected, because of it's old French. 'Will your Majesty permit me to try a life?' said Racine. The king consented. Our poet took down a volume of Amiot, and turned his obsolete language into a beautiful style. Louis was in raptures; he rose, and embraced the poet.

It is with difficulty I can persuade myself, that Charles I. would have been a tyrant. The Eikon Basilike, which I consider as the memoirs of his heart, abounds with such strokes of natural feeling, and so powerfully excites our sympathy, that we cannot easily conceive how a tyrant could have assumed such a character. I give in the note some interesting passages from this work.*. The following anecdote, which Mr. Malone reports

* 'I cared not to lessen myself in some things of my wonted prerogative, since I knew I could be no loser, if I might but gain a recompens in my subjects affections.' p. 2.

* 'Popular tumults are not like a storm at sea, which yet wants not it's terror; but like an earth-quake, shaking the verie foundations of all, then which nothing in the world hath more of horror.' p. 14.

* 'More than the law gives me, I would not have, and less the meaneſt ſubject ſhould not.' p. 24.

* 'I will studie to ſatiſſie my parliament and my people; but I will never, for fear or flatterie, gratifie anie faction, how potent ſoever; for this were to nourish the diſeaſe, and oppreſs the bodie.' p. 75.

* The

reports from the memorandums of the Master of the Revels, tends to prove, that even in prosperity, he would not suffer his people to be insulted by the language of despotism. The following lines were in a manuscript play of Massinger ;

Monies ? We'll raise supplies *what ways we please*,
And force you to subscribe to blanks, in which
We'll mulct you as we shall think fit. The Cefars
In Rome were wise, acknowledging no laws,
But what their *swords* did ratify—

I cannot do better than transcribe the words of Sir Henry Herbert. ' I have entered
' this, here, for ever to bee remembered by
' my son, and those that cast their eyes on
' it, in honour of king Charles, my master,

' The sens of the injuries don unto my subjects, is as sharp
' as those don to myself.—My afflictions griev mee not
' more, then this doth, that I am afflicted by those, whose
' prosperitie I earnestly desire, and whose seduction I heartily
' deplore.—Yet I had rather suffer all the miseries of life,
' and die many deaths, then shamefully to desert, or disho-
' nourably to betrai my own just rights and soveriegnitie.'
p. 109.

' I know the sharp and necessarie tyrannie of my destroyers
' will sufficiently confute the calumnies of tyrannie against
' mee.' p. 229.

' It is verie strange, that mariners can finde no other
' means to appeas the storm themselves have raised, but by
' drowning their pilot.' p. 233.

‘ who, readinge over the play at Newmarket,
 ‘ *set his marke* upon the place with his owne
 ‘ hande and thes words,

‘ *This is too insolent, and to bee changed.*’

This anecdote, with others which might be given, and the whole of the eloquent Eikon Basilike, strongly indicate, that the inclinations of Charles were remote from tyranny. He was, indeed, firmly persuaded, that a king had just powers, of which it was as necessary to be careful, as of the just rights of his people. Such was his conviction, that he preferred death, to what he considered to be ignominy.

I conclude this topic with an anecdote of the late unfortunate Louis XVI. little known, but which forcibly characterizes the dispositions of this monarch. In a conversation on the subject of Rousseau’s works, he said, that he wished it were possible to annihilate the *Emilius*, on education; because, in that book, the author attacks religion, disturbs the security of society, and the just subordination of citizens; it can only tend to render men unhappy.—But the social contract has also a most dangerous tendency, observed a courtier.—‘ As for that,’

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replied

replied this most excellent prince, in words which must not be forgotten, ' it is very different. It only attacks the authority of sovereigns; that is a subject proper to discuss. There is much to be said; it is susceptible of controversy.'

It is impossible to deny, that this anecdote reveals the dispositions of the monarch. It is curious to observe, that Charles I. lost his head, because he was tenacious of his rights, and Louis XVI. because he was ever prompt to yield them to his subjects. A striking testimony this, of the mad ignorance of the multitude, who know not either to govern others, or themselves*.

If it is not too solemn a question for this light essay, I ask in what manner is the knowledge of human nature acquired?

By anecdotes we become acquainted with human nature.

• Patin has made an admirable reflection on the caprices of that many-headed monster, the people. These are his words: ' Indeed, the people know not what they would have, nor what they should have. *Plebs plerumque contra sua commoda certat.* The people neither know or follow their interests. They murmur against those who elevate themselves; and they do not reflect, that when these fall, others will appear, who will be still more desirous of doing the same thing, or, perhaps, greater evils, and who can only succeed but at the new cost of the people.'

Of

Of some extraordinary minds it has been said, that their knowledge is attained by that sublime conception, which surveys at one glance the species, and becomes as it were by intuition, familiar with the individual. A Shakespeare has certainly given the most forcible language and descriptions to characters and situations, which never passed under his eye. Such phenomena in nature we admire; but who would imitate? We gain our knowledge by the slow accession of multiplied facts; these our reflection combines, and thus combined, they form what we call experience. Rochefoucault, when with such energetic conciseness, he composed his celebrated Maxims, had ever some particular circumstance, or some particular individual, before him. When he observed, that, 'It displays a great poverty of mind, to have only one kind of genius,' he drew this reflection from repeated *anecdotes* which he had collected in the persons of Boileau and Racine *. It was a very happy idea of Amelot de la Houffaie, when he gave an edition of these admirable Maxims, to illustrate several from

* See Curiosities of Literature, vol. ii. art. *Poets*.

examples,

examples, or anecdotes, drawn from history. If they were all thus illustrated, by well-collected authorities, it would form not only a rich repast for amateurs of anecdotes, but impress more forcibly the solid sense, sometimes too closely compressed in these concise maxims *.

The bulk of mankind indeed, when facts present themselves to their contemplation, are incapable of contemplating. Ignorant of their utility, they only regard them as objects of idle amusement. Yet the science of human nature, like the science of physics, was never perfected till vague theory was rejected for certain experiment.

* I will add an instance or two, in what manner Houssaie has enforced some of these reflections.

Roche foucault observes, 'In jealousy there is less love than self-love.' Which reflection Houssaie illustrates by this anecdote, taken from Tacitus, 'Witness Rhadamistus, who threw his beloved wife into a river, that she might not fall into the hands of another.'

The duke observes, 'The art of setting off moderate qualifications, steals esteem; and often gives more reputation than real merit.' His commentator gives, on this observation, the following character from Tacitus: 'Poppæus Sabinus, of moderate birth, obtained the consulship, and the honour of a triumph; and governed, for four and twenty years, the greatest provinces, without any extraordinary merit; being just capable of his employments, and in no manner above them.'

An

An Addison and a Bruyere accompany their reflections by characters; an anecdote in their hand informs us better than a whole essay of Seneca. Opinions are fallible, but not examples.

A writer elegantly declaims against the vanity of a poet; but when he judiciously gives a few of the innumerable instances of poetical vanity, we shall comprehend him with more certainty, and follow his reflections with the firm conviction of truth. Would he inform us, that innumerable little follies prevail in very great minds? Every opinion is disputable. We are persuaded of it's truth, when he reminds us, that Sir Robert Walpole, a great minister, was ambitious of being a man of gallantry; and that another great minister, Cardinal Richelieu, was not less ambitious of being distinguished as a poet; and that the one was as awkward in his compliments, as the other in his verses. In a word, the wise Elizabeth was a coquette. The ambitious Charles V. terminated his career by watch-making. Racine believed himself to be a politician.

When an author gives a character which strikes by it's singularity, an anecdote will
serve

serve to establish the veracity of its existence. Thus the character of the astronomer in *Rasselas*, so finely described by Johnson, is a character founded in nature. With a wonderful sublimity of genius, this student is represented with an imbecillity little to be suspected, that of believing himself invested with the power of regulating the seasons. A similar character was this of Postel. His Lectures were attended by such crouds, that he was obliged to harangue his auditors at a window, as the hall of the college at Paris was not sufficiently large to contain them; yet this man, (otherwise so judicious) cherished the extravagant folly of believing himself endowed with a supernatural reason. He hoped to convert all the nations of the earth, and had ever in his mind the idea of creating an order, to be called the Knights of Christ; and for this purpose associated himself with the jesuits, who expelled him when they perceived his distempered imagination.

We cannot therefore accumulate too great a number of such little facts; I say facts, otherwise we may err in our deductions: as, when one part of a sum is wrong, the total amount must infallibly be so. Facts
are

are anecdotes, but anecdotes are not always facts.

It is only the complaint of unreflecting minds, that we collect too many anecdotes. Why is human knowledge imperfect, but because life does not allow of sufficient years to enable us to follow the infinity of nature? The man of most experience, still finds that he has new characters to understand, old opinions to confirm, and knowledge to correct, as well as to acquire. Human nature, like a vast machine, is not to be understood by looking on its superficies, but by dwelling on its minute springs and little wheels. Let us no more then be told, that anecdotes are the little objects of a little mind.

Anecdotes
lead the
mind into
reflections.

Anecdotes will be found to possess, in some degree, the perfection of instruction. They produce in an ingenious observer, those leading thoughts which throw the mind into an agreeable train of thinking. A skilful writer of anecdotes, gratifies by suffering us to make something that looks like a discovery of our own; he gives a certain activity to the mind, and the reflections appear to arise from ourselves. He throws unperceivably seeds, and we see those flowers start up, which we believe to be of our own creation.

creation. A few pages of interesting anecdotes, afford ample food for the mind*.

If we regard anecdotes as they are connected with the republic of letters, I do not hesitate to declare, that they offer the most exquisite gratification.

In literary biography, a man of genius always finds something which relates to himself. In the history of his fellow students, a writer traces the effects of similar studies; he is warned by their failures, or animated by their progress. He discovers that, like himself, the sublimest geniuses have frequently stretched the bow without force, and without skill. He is not displeased to find that Pope composed an epic, a tragedy, and a comedy; that the two first were burnt, and the comedy damned. La Mothe was so sensibly afflicted by the unfortunate fate of his first dramatic essay, that he renounced the society of men, and buried himself in the melancholy retreat of La Trappe.

On Literary
Anecdotes.

* I quote the observation of a man of genius on this subject. Lord Bolingbroke says, 'When examples are pointed out to us, there is a kind of appeal with which we are flattered, made to our senses, as well as our understandings. The instruction comes then from our own authorities. We yield to fact, when we resist speculation.'

He

He perhaps considered, that a condemned poet would make an excellent penitent *.

Various
anecdotes
illustrating
literary to-
pics.

From anecdotes a man of letters gathers the following particulars interesting to him.

It is curious to observe the first dawn of genius breaking on the mind: Sometimes a man of genius, in his first effusions, is so far from revealing his future powers, that, on the contrary, no reasonable hope can be formed of his success: In the violent struggle of his mind, he may give a wrong direction to his talents; as Swift, in two pindaric odes, which have been unfortunately preserved in his works. Sometimes a man of genius displays no talents, even among those who are able to decide on them; his genius, like Æneas, is veiled by a cloud, and remains unperceived by his associates: This was the case of Goldsmith; who was so far from displaying a fine genius, that even his literary companions, before the publication of his beautiful poems, regarded

* These instances (and many similar ones of celebrated writers, might be added) I give, not from any petty malignancy of criticism, but with the intention of the writers of the holy Scriptures; who report the failings of *Saints*, that those of feeble powers may not want something to keep them from despair.

him

him as a compiler for the Booksellers, not as a writer for men of taste. Sometimes, when a writer displays an early genius, it is not expressed with all its force. Several have begun versifiers, and concluded poets; and perhaps this is no unjust idea of Pope.

Is a man of genius oppressed with domestic miseries? Does he tread on thorns, while he cultivates flowers? he ceases to feel his own griefs, while he contemplates those of his masters. On the misfortunes of the learned, more than one volume has been composed *. The domestic persecutions of a man of genius are more frequent, and more formidable to his sensibility, than those of a party or of the public. Exquisite misery! to feel the lacerations of the soul, from the objects to which it turns for repose and delight! An illiterate parent, who harasses the mild dispositions of his

* Pierius Valerianus, has given a little book, intitled, *De infelicitate litteratorum*, which he wrote from his own situation, in which for many years he participated in the miseries he recorded of other scholars. It was afterwards greatly enlarged.—A collection has been published at Leipzig, in 1647, entitled *Analekta de calamitate litteratorum*. Several other works on this subject have appeared.

philosophic son, and who counts, with all the anxiety of the father and the merchant, the hours he lavishes on his studies, has been an ordinary misery of literary men. The father of Petrarch one day, in a barbarous rage, burnt his small but invaluable library before his face; and Voltaire, with a thousand other writers, have broken their fathers' heart by their constant application to poetry, and utter neglect of the law *. But

* Hume says, in the slight sketch he gives of his life, ' My studious disposition, my sobriety, and my industry, gave my family a notion that the law was a proper profession for me; but I found an insurmountable aversion to every thing but the pursuits of philosophy, and general learning; and while they fancied I was poring upon Voet and Vinnius, Cicero and Virgil were the authors which I was secretly devouring.'

Young has described the character of such a parent as Descartes with his usual vigour of wit:

Lampridius, from the bottom of his breast,
Sighs o'er one child, but triumphs in the rest.
How just his grief! one carries in his head
A less proportion of the father's lead.
The *dung-hill* breed of men a diamond scorn,
And feel a passion for a *grain of corn*;
Some stupid, plodding, money-loving wight,
Who wins their hearts by knowing black from white,
Who with much pains exerting *all* his sense,
Can range aright his shillings, pounds, and pence.
The booby father craves a booby son,
And by Heaven's blessing thinks himself undone.

I hasten

I hasten to conclude a list, which perhaps is interminable. Can we read without indignation, that the family of the great Descartes were insensible to the lustre his studies reflected on their name? They grievously lamented, as a blot, which could not be effaced from their arms, that Descartes, who was born a *gentleman*, should become a *philosopher*! This elevated genius was even denied the satisfaction of embracing his expiring parent; while his dwarfish brother, whose mind must have been as diminutive as his person, ridiculed his philosophic relative, and turned to advantage his philosophic dispositions. The sublime Bacon generally sat at the end of his table in a state of abstraction, while at the other his dependants cheated, ridiculed, and loaded him with infamous aspersions. We must not look into the domestic recesses of men of genius, if we would consider them as beloved or happy.

The purpose of this Dissertation is an attempt, however feeble, to exhibit the utility, and the delight of anecdote in the investigation of any topic. I therefore shall

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not

not wander from it, if I sketch several subjects which relate to literary men, and which shall consist of reflections, illustrated by anecdotes.

It has been said, that Envy is only the offspring of little minds. This has been repeated from age to age; but it is one of those popular prejudices which are not the less false, because they are of a remote date. Of literary jealousy, to select instances were difficult, because of their abundance. Why did Swift and Milton treat with contempt the rhimes of Dryden? Why did Corneille, tottering on the grave, when Racine consulted him on his first tragedy, advise the author never to write another? Why does Voltaire continually detract from the sublimity of Corneille, the sweetness of Racine, and the fire of Crebillon? Why was the admirable La Fontaine not even mentioned by the French Horace in all his works? Why must posterity lament that the name of Young is to be found in the Dunciad of Pope? Why did Boccaccio, in sending to Petrarch a copy of Dante, make an apology for it? and why did the latter, in his answer, speak coldly of Dante's merits?

The

The rigid virtue of Johnson could not save him from the meanest envy of Garrick; nor the artless dispositions of Goldsmith from the corrosion of literary jealousy.

It is difficult to repress our indignation at this envy of writers, who should look for that support from each other, which is sometimes unjustly denied them by the world. In contemplating on this subject, we are struck with the same horror as if we were to look into a nest of doves, and behold vipers hissing at each other.

We must feel another kind of indignation, which falls not upon authors, but their readers. Men of genius have complained, that their acquaintance are the last persons in the world, whose affections they can win. I collect several testimonies,

When the voice of the public shall inform the friends of a man of genius, how much he merits their affection, they will be incapable of bestowing it. A familiar acquaintance with an author (observes Hume) may diminish the applause due to his performance. It was the eternal misery of Rousseau, that his friends did not know how much he merited their affections. On

this subject, in the ‘Thirty Letters,’ the acute writer* has judiciously observed, that ‘none judge less favourably of an author than his intimate friends; their personal knowledge of him, as a man, destroys a hundred delusions to his advantage as an author.’——Monnoye, in a letter written when he first made his appearance as a writer, has described the situation of a young author with sensibility and truth. These are his words: ‘You know the town I inhabit: one of the greatest faults a man can have, it seems, is a little merit; a multitude of enemies is the certain fate of all those who appear desirous of distinguishing themselves. You have read my poem on the abolishment of duels. They said, at first, that it was good for nothing; and after the Academy had crowned it, they pretended that it was not written by me. I have seen myself blackened by the grossest calumnies.’

A French orator exclaims, ‘It is true, that a superior genius finds himself some-

* The ingenious Mr. Jackson of Exeter, whose literary attainments will, perhaps, one day be acknowledged not to be inferior to his musical powers.

' times esteemed during his life-time ; but
 ' he must generally seek for it, at the dis-
 ' tance of three hundred leagues.' I tran-
 scribe, on this subject, what the ingenious
 author of the Mirror writes, perhaps prompt-
 ed by his own feelings. In mentioning the
 work, he says, ' The place of it's publica-
 ' tion was, in several respects, disadvanta-
 ' geous. There is a certain distance at which
 ' writings, as well as men, should be placed,
 ' in order to command our attention and
 ' respect. We do not easily allow a title to
 ' instruct or to amuse the public, in our neigh-
 ' bour, with whom we have been accus-
 ' tomed to compare our own abilities. Hence
 ' the fastidiousness with which, in a place so
 ' narrow as Edinburgh, home productions
 ' are commonly received ; which, if they are
 ' grave, they are pronounced dull ; if pa-
 ' thetic, are entitled unnatural ; if ludicrous,
 ' are termed low.' So just is this last ob-
 servation, that I cannot forbear noticing,
 that when Rousseau published at Neuf-
 chatel some little compositions, they were
 not relished by his good provincial friends :
 a few years afterwards, they contributed
 to the literary pleasures of Paris. It was

not the qualities of his writings that had changed, but those of his readers.

— If the reader does not dislike these anecdotal observations, he will not be displeased with another specimen.

Dr. Joseph Warton, who has employed anecdotes with such pleasing effect in his *Essay on the Genius of Pope*, has given the following one of a celebrated poet.

He writes, ‘ So little sensible are we of
‘ our own imperfections, that the very last
‘ time I saw Dr. Young, he was severely
‘ censuring and ridiculing the false pomp
‘ of fustian writers, and the nauseousness of
‘ bombast.’

I pursue this speculation, interesting to literature.

Of Seneca, it is observed in the *Perro-niana*, that he himself writes against pointed periods, and the epigrammatic style. *Lip-fius* was extravagantly fond of a certain concise style; his epistles offend by a continued affectation of this kind; yet he not only censures brevity, and declares it to produce a dry jejune mode of writing, but minutely enters into it's numerous defects. *Cicero* very warmly reprehends that abuse, with
which

which the Greeks were accustomed to scatter their adversaries; and who frequently passed from the censure of the work, to satirizing the author himself. But Cicero has left posterity no few specimens of the abusive style, and the grossest personalities. While Plato inveighs against poetry, he proves himself a great poet. It is thus Mallebranche declaims against the seductive charms of a fine imagination, while he displays a most beautiful and deluding one. Boccacini, as Bayle observes, makes Apollo give very judicious advice to an author, who was hanged for too freely satirizing some noble families; but our sage adviser himself lost his life for having written too freely concerning the Spanish court*.

Burnet,

* I give the observation here alluded to. He says, that a judicious historian imitates the grape-gatherer: he waits till time has matured the harvest; that is, from speaking of facts, till those who have committed dishonourable actions are no more, and their children have not the power of avenging them.

Marville gives the following account of the singular death of our satirist. He says, 'Boccacini was the author of *La Pietra di Parrangone*, a satire against the Spaniards. Too much wit and passion, occasioned our author to be *sacchettato*; that is, he was so heartily beaten by the Spaniards, that he died a few hours afterwards. This is an invention

Burnet, in the 'History of his own Times,' which is almost as fabulous as Lucian's 'True History,' is, however, (and he was a bishop) continually appealing to God and his conscience for the veracity of his work. These are some of his expressions: 'I solemnly say this to the world, and make my humble appeal upon it to the great God of truth, that I tell the truth on all occasions'—'I reckon a lie in history to be as much a greater sin than a lie in common discourse, as the one is like to be more lasting and more generally known than the other.' Our bishop had immoderate prejudices, and a lively imagination; indulging these to an excess, he left far behind him the sober truth of 'a faithful chronicler.' Mr. Lesly, who knew him familiarly, has well described his character, by saying, 'He was zealous for the truth,

'vention of the Italians to murder a man, without spilling his blood, by beating him on the back with *bags of sand*. The wounds these give are incurable; a gangrene takes place, and death concludes this mode of assassination.'

This will serve as another instance of that inventive genius of assassination, which once characterized the Italians; and which has not entirely deserted their ordinary language, as well as their passions.

' but

‘ but in telling it, he always turned it into
‘ a lie*,’

Cowley,

* The following advice to the reader of Burnet's History, forms an ingenious epigram. I give the Latin original, with its translation.

Monitum lectori, quomodo legenda sit Burnetti Historia sui
Temporis, et pro verâ admittenda.

Leguntur Hebræo verso ordine Literæ,
Cancrique, serpunt in contrarium gradus;
Tenella virgo, si quem amat perditæ
(Ea est profervitas) fugit, tanquam oderit;
Quemque odit Aulicus, (tanta est urbanitas)
Amore abundans quasi studiosus colit;
Ut Hebræa legi, cancos ut gradi vides,
Tenella ut odit virgo amat ut Aulicus,
Hâc lege Lucianus historiam suam,
Suamque Burnettus ipse veram dixerit.

Attempted in English.

Advice to the reader of Burnet's History of his own Time,
how it may be read, and admitted for truth.

The Hebrew characters are backward read,
The crab-fish backward crawls with aukward tread;
The tender virgin scorched by Cupid's fires;
Will seem to hate the man she most desires;
The subtle courtier most obsequious waits,
And most pretends to love, whom most he hates.
As Hebrew books are read, as crab-fish move,
As virgins hate, and as sly courtiers love,
Just so may Lucian, nay, and Burnet too,
Each boldly vouch their histories are true.

We are astonished at the solemn appeals which our Bishop makes to Heaven, for the veracity of his facts. I suppose most readers imagine that he must have been sensible that he was only calling on Heaven to serve as a testimony to sanction lies.

Cowley, in his Ode to Wit, has the following ingenious stanza ; which, however, is but

lies. This, however, (to do as much justice as possible to the Bishop) does not appear to me to be the case. Burnet has been called the English Varillas ; and the character of the latter writer, attacked by the learned of all nations, and particularly in this country by the ingenious Dr. King, may serve to illustrate that of Burnet.

Varillas has been accused of quoting memoirs which never existed, or in which the facts he relates are not to be found. It is however very true that Varillas had read an astonishing number of original memoirs. The life of this man was consumed in his study ; and it was his boast, that for thirty years he had not dined from home. He had read so many manuscripts, that his sight failed, and he lost the use of one eye. By candle-light he could not read ; and it was his custom to close his windows at dusk, and then to *write* his Histories. But as he could not authenticate his anecdotes, by consulting the memoirs which had been furnished to him from the King's Library, in which there is a collection from 8 to 10,000 Mss. he trusted to his memory. This naturally produced his confusion in facts ; what belonged to one kingdom was given to a neighbouring country ; what related to one person was transferred to another.

It is therefore possible to suppose that neither Varillas nor Burnet intended to impose on the world. But from these anecdotes we may enforce a very important maxim, that an Historian must not write as *facts* what he only collects from *memory* ; he must authenticate his sources, whatever they may be, by correct citations. If he does otherwise, he is not to be trusted ; for however honest may be his intentions, it is certain that he will not only impose on his reader, but impose on himself. Let it also be remembered, that he who relies on his memory, is frequently the dupe of his imagination.

but a splendid satire on his own witty poetry. He says, WIT is not

——To adorn, and gild each part,
That shews more cost, than art.

Jewels at nose and lips, but ill appear;
Rather than all things wit, let none be there.

Several lights will not be seen,
If there be nothing else between;
Men doubt, because they stand so thick i' th' sky,
If those be stars, which paint the Galaxy.

It will not be denied, that the indiscreet muse of Cowley wore jewels both at her nose and her lips.

It is thus also that Dr. Johnson, in some admirable verses *, censures those writers in whose plays,

——Crush'd by rules, and weaken'd as refin'd,
For years the power of Tragedy declin'd;
From bard to bard the frigid caution crept,
Till *Declamation* roar'd, while *Passion* slept.

In the tragedy of Irene it must be acknowledged that ' declamation roars, while passion sleeps.'

In a word, to conclude this topic, I have observed a hundred French writers declaim against the abuse of what they so happily

* Prologue spoken at the opening of the Drury-Lane Theatre in 1747.

call *le bel esprit*; while they are themselves employing it in every period—a hundred English authors abusing the French writers, while at the same time their work and their style are alike an imitation of them.

If I were to make the following observation, I would accompany it with the following anecdotes.

A man of genius consumes one portion of his life in painful studies; another in addressing his labours to the public, and combating with his rivals; in the last inconsiderable remnant of life, he perhaps begins to enjoy that public esteem for which he had sacrificed the solid consolations of life, his fortune, his tranquillity, in a word, his domestic Lares. Amidst the funereal cypresses he sees the green leaves of the laurel. He resembles a veteran soldier, who should, at the moment he is carried from the trenches in an expiring state, receive the honours of promotion. When he is once removed from the public and his rivals, there is nothing they refuse him.

Every little thing that belonged to this man
of

of genius becomes an invaluable relic. The living Shakespeare experienced little of that adoration which has been repeatedly paid to him by posterity. Little did he imagine that the *Mulberry Tree* which he planted (supposing he did plant it) would have been fought after with as much eagerness as a pious Catholic shews for a piece of the real cross. Thomson never imagined that his *old chair* * would have been beheld with the eyes of adoration by his countrymen. Rabelais, among all his drollest imaginations, never conceived that his *cloak* would be preserved in the university of Montpellier, that those who are received as doctors should wear it on the day they take their degree.

Such is the public! long misled by the

* In a festival in honour of the Poet of the Seasons, the chair in which it is supposed he composed part of his Seasons, was produced, and communicated a poetic rapture to the admirers of the Muse, assembled for this occasion. Even honest Aubrey can admire the *chair* of a man of genius. Our antiquary says of Ben Jonson, in the curious manuscript which Mr. Malone has given in his account of the English Stage, I 'have seen his studyeing chaire which was of strawe, such as 'old women used; and as Aulus Gellius is drawn in.' Aubrey should himself have had such 'a studyeing chaire,' for he was 'an old woman.'

malice

malice of rivals, their decisions are capricious, irresolute, and unjust. Posterity, while it censures the past age, commits the same injustice to its contemporaries. It exhausts its admiration on an old tree, an old chair, and an old cloak, while the modern Shakespeares, Thomsons, and Rabelais (if there should be any) would pass unobserved by its injudicious applause.

I shall add one more sketch of a literary topic.

Men of genius catch inspiration from that of others. Their mind is not always prepared to pour forth its burning ideas ; it is kindled by the flame which it strikes from the collision of the works of great writers. It was thus that Cicero informs us that he animated his eloquence by a constant perusal of the poetry of the Latins and Greeks. Poets awaken their imagination by the verses of other poets. Malherbe, Corneille, and Racine, before they applied themselves to composition, put their mind into its proper tone, by repeating the glowing passages of their favourite poets. The most fervid verses of Homer, and the sweetest of Euripides,

Euripides, enriched the memory of Milton*. It is related of Bossuet, that before he composed a funeral oration, he was accustomed to withdraw for four or five days into his study, and read Homer. When he was asked the reason of this practice, he expressed himself in these verses,

——— Magnam mihi mentem, animumque,
Delius inspirat vates———

Marville says, that the famous orators in the pulpit and at the bar, of his time, used to read the finest passages of the poets, to germinate those seeds of eloquence which nature had scattered in their souls. It was thus also, that a celebrated preacher boldly copied Seneca, the tragedian, in the violent passions he assumed; and one less ardent, but more tender, interwove in his sermons pieces taken from Ovid. One pleader would only breathe the fury of Juvenal; another displayed the graceful turns which he had borrowed from Horace.

* 'Milton,' (says Richardson) 'had read and studied all the greatest Poets, and had made all his own; Homer he could almost repeat without book.'

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We

Collections
of anecdotes
serve as an
excellent
substitute for
the conver-
sations of
eminent
writers.

We now turn to the consideration of those literary collections which give the anecdotes and conversations of celebrated men.

The conversations of scholars have been collected in ages of literature. That they have not been formed with that care, and that selection they merited, has been the only cause of their having fallen into disrepute. With such substitutes we are enabled, in no ordinary degree, to realise the society of those who are no more; and to become more real contemporaries with the great men of another age, than were even their contemporaries themselves.

Are we not all desirous of joining the society of eminent men? It is a wish of even the illiterate. But the sensibility of genius shrinks tremblingly from the contact of the vulgar, and the arrogance of learning will not descend to their level. They prefer a contemplative silence, rather than incur the chance of being insulted by their admiration.

Few therefore can be admitted to their conversations. Yet when a man of genius displays conversible talents, his conversations are frequently more animated, more versatile,

fatile, and, I must add, more genuine than his compositions. Such literary conversations may be compared to waters which flow from their source ; but literary writings resemble more frequently an ornamented fountain, whose waters are forced to elevate themselves in artificial irregularities, and sparkling tortuosities.

These collections are productive of utility. A man of letters learns from a little conversation which has been fortuitously preserved ; a casual hint which was gathered as it fell ; and an observation which its author might never have an occasion to insert in his works, numberless mysteries in the art of literary composition ; and those minute circumstances which familiarize us to the genius of one whom we admire, and whom sometimes we aspire to imitate.

Literary history has indeed been pursued with a passionate fondness by our first scholars. I will not wander from home on this occasion, though our neighbours far surpass us in this pleasing species of erudition. Dr. Johnson has said, ' It was what he most loved.' It is curious to observe, that he begins his Biography of our Poets,

Observations
on the de-
light of lite-
rary history.

by a complaint of ‘ the penury of English
‘ biography.’ It is the regret of one who
felt all it’s charms, and who perhaps
lamented that he could not much improve
its miserable fund. Dr. Warburton has
called literary history, ‘ the most agreeable
‘ subject in the world.’ Dr. Warton, in
his Essay on the Genius of Pope, has pre-
sented us with an admirable specimen in
what manner literary anecdote may be in-
troduced for the illustration of an author,
and delight of the reader. Pelisson, in
his History of the French Academy, has
made an observation on literary history,
which will find an echo in the bosom of
every man of letters. He writes, ‘ Had we
‘ any particulars remaining of what passed
‘ between Augustus, Mecenas, and the cele-
‘ brated wits of their age, I know not whe-
‘ ther we should read this history with less
‘ curiosity and delight than that of the wars,
‘ and affairs of the government of those
‘ times. Perhaps (to say something more)
‘ we should not read it with less utility and
‘ instruction: we, I say, to whom Fortune
‘ has given, nor armies to conduct, nor
‘ politics to govern; but to whom she has
‘ only

‘ only bequeathed study, conversation, and
 ‘ the domestic virtues.’ Literary anecdotes carry with them so powerful an attraction, that we consult with pleasure the *Athenæ Oxonienses* of Anthony Wood, though composed in a hard, dry, and repulsive style. Another work of a congenial cast, is Hawkins’s *Life of Johnson*, whose genius revived that of the four Wood. Mr. Nichols, in his *Life of Bowyer*, has made a most valuable accession of cotemporary anecdote; perhaps a happier arrangement, and a more copious criticism, are desirable. Mr. Boswell, in his *Life of Johnson*, has exquisitely gratified the amateur of literary anecdotes. To compare it with Monnoye’s edition of the *Menagiana*, would not be doing justice to this work, which is almost as singular in it’s nature, as it’s merit. It is with pleasure that I perceive of late, that several writers of taste have not considered it as beneath their powers to become commentators. Mr. T. Warton, Mr. Steevens, Mr. Malone, and Dr. Farmer, stand eminently distinguished in this class of literature, which has hitherto been assigned to writers of low talents.

These critics have felt all the charms of literary history; and their curious researches interest us much more by the pleasure we feel in their perusal, than by that recondite erudition in English literature, which they so admirably display *.

* Pope, whose criticism is almost ever unerring, miserably failed when he satirized those who applied to the forgotten volumes of our old authors, to elucidate the writings and manners of another age. Attached to the classics of Greece and Rome, he perhaps did not recollect that there is a time in the literature of every polished nation, when it has classics of its own. There is a bigotry in literature, as well as in religion. So ignorant was Pope of our old English writers, that he lamented he had not been acquainted with the satires of Bishop Hall, when he devoted his muse to satirical composition. How many other authors are there, on whose soil his industry would have gleaned many a rich sheaf! Had he known more of these writers, he would have hardly ventured to commit depredations on Milton.

We are not, therefore, any more to be told of,

‘ All such reading, as was never read.’

The great critic, after he gave this sarcastic observation, amply confuted himself by his own edition of Shakespeare.

I transcribe the judicious opinion which Mr. Warton has made in his observations on Spenser. He says, ‘ In criticizing upon Milton, Jonson and Spenser, and some other of our elder poets, not only a competent knowledge of all ancient classical learning is requisite, but also an acquaintance with those books, which, though now forgotten and lost, were yet in repute about the time in which each author respectively wrote, and which it is most likely he had read.’

Without

Without the use of literary anecdote, it is in vain to attempt literary biography.

Literary biography cannot be accomplished without a copious use of anecdote.

A biographer should be more solicitous of displaying the genius of the man whose history he writes, than his own. He should not obtrude his own talents on the eye, so much as those of the person whose life he records. Some have written the life of another, merely to shew that they were themselves fine writers.

When Richardson, the father, gave the life of Milton, he did not compose it in the ordinary style of biographers. If we take away some of his excentricities, his manner is admirable. It is very possible to write the life of a poet, a lord chancellor, and a general, almost in a similar style *. What

* It was said of Mallet, after he had given the life of Bacon, and who pretended to be employed on that of Marlborough, that, as he had forgotten that Verulam had been a philosopher, he would probably forget that Marlborough had been a general. He did better. He took £.500 for his Life, and never wrote a page of it. By the way, this has been no uncommon practice among authors. Some have published a variety of titles of works, as if they were ready for the press; but of which the titles only had been written. Paschal, who was historiographer to Francis I. forged such titles, that the pension which he received for occupying himself on the French history might be continued. When he died, all his historical performances did not exceed six pages !

is the consequence of such idle biography? With much trouble we find, at length, that the genius of either remains yet to be known. One poet is made to resemble another; and, what is worse, a poet resembles a lord chancellor. Richardson, a Miltonic enthusiast, was best qualified to give the biography of Milton an enthusiast. He did not remain satisfied with collecting the information which industrious enquiry produced, but he studied to give the character of Milton from his own descriptions. He connected, with an ardour of research, for which posterity should be grateful, from all his works, in verse and in prose, the minute circumstances, and peculiar sentiments, which our sublime poet had recorded of himself.

In reading this sketch of the manners, and the genius, of Milton, we seem to live with him; we participate in the momentary griefs which afflicted him, and the momentary triumphs in which he exulted. We join the old blind bard at the door of his house, near Bunhill-fields*; we see him sit there in a grey coarse cloth coat, in the

* Most of the following particulars are given in the lively expressions of Richardson.

warm sunny weather, breathing the fresh air. His house is, indeed, small, (and what true poet ever possessed a large one?) It has but one room on a floor. Up one pair of stairs, hung in rusty green, sits John Milton, in an elbow chair, in black clothes, yet neat enough. Pale, but not cadaverous; his hands gouty.

And what does Milton say on his blindness, when his enemies reproach him with it as a crime? These are his words, taken from his second defence of the English nation: ‘ I prefer my blindness to your’s,’ (he addresses his adversaries) ‘ your’s is sunk
 ‘ into your deepest senses, blinding your
 ‘ minds, so that you can see nothing that is
 ‘ sound and solid. Mine takes from me
 ‘ only the colour and surface of things, but
 ‘ does not take away from the mind’s con-
 ‘ templation, what is in those things of true
 ‘ and constant. Moreover, how many things
 ‘ are there which I would not see! How many
 ‘ which I can be debarred the sight without
 ‘ repining! How few left which I much
 ‘ desire to see! Vile men! who mock us!
 ‘ The blind have a protection from the in-
 ‘ juries of men, and we are rendered almost
 ‘ sacred.

‘ sacred. To this I impute, that my friends
 ‘ are more ready and officious to serve me
 ‘ than before, and more frequently visit me.
 ‘ They do not think that the only worth of
 ‘ an honest man is placed in his eyes.’

Richardson would have considered himself as fortunate, had he been enabled to add another lively scene to the domestic life of Milton. This has been obtained by the late laureat, who, in his second edition of his juvenile poems, has given the nuncupative will of our poet. I gather from a mass of the barren superfluities of legal information, those interesting strokes with which every man of sensibility and taste will sympathize. We must recollect, that at the period to which they relate, Milton was no more the secretary of the commonwealth, and his friends were destroyed or dispersed. These little facts describe more forcibly than the most eloquent declamation, those secret miseries which preyed on the heart of Milton, and which must not only have disturbed his sublime contemplations, but impeded the vigour of his fancy, and the corrections of his criticism.

It is here we learn that his children combined to cheat and to rob him; to embitter
 his

his hours with scorn and disaffection; and far from solacing the age of their venerable, their sublime parent, they became impatient of his death. He had

‘No fond companion of his helpless years.’

GOLDSMITH.

The name of Milton must be added to the melancholy catalogue of the unhappy learned. Behold the great Milton, blind, decrepid, poor, and solitary (for solitary he must then have been amidst those who now surrounded him) seated by a little fire in his kitchen, crying to his wife, with a voice of patient grief, ‘Make much of me as long as I live.’—When his meat is brought to him, because it is made agreeable to his taste (for he was delicate though temperate) he exclaims with grateful pleasure to his wife, ‘God have mercy, Betty, I see thou wilt perform according to thy promise, in providing me such dishes as I think fit, whilst I live.’—Such is our own domestic language, and such was the domestic language of the sublimest genius. Genius is not above the little consolations of humanity.

Let me reflect a moment on the scene that occupies my imagination. Men of
 x
 genius!

genius! the reflection is addressed to you. Milton had perhaps wandered in the fields of fancy, and consoled his blindness with listening to the voice of his nation, that was to have resounded with his name. To Virgil, and Tasso, and Ariosto, not his masters but his rivals, their country had not been ungrateful. One had basked in the sunshine of a court; the other had seen the laurel wreath prepared for him at Rome; and the last lived to hear his name repeated in the streets, and saluted as the poet of his nation. Milton had enriched his national poetry with two epics—what were his rewards? Milton considered himself as fortunate in having one female who did not entirely abandon him; and one obscure fanatic, who was pleased with his poems because they were religious. What laurels! What felicities!

Je lis les noms des poètes fameux;
Ou sont les noms des poètes heureux?

GRESSET.

Anecdotes
considered as
a source of
literary
amusement
superior to
romances.

On anecdotes judiciously arranged, another observation is to be made.

Men of letters, to unbend from their feverer studies, have frequently had recourse
to

to the works of mere imagination. Romances have been admitted into their libraries; they fly

——— from serious Antonine,

To Rabelais' ravings, and from prose to verse.

ARMSTRONG.

To solace mental fatigue by the amusements of fancy, is no loss of time. Students know how often the eye is busied in wandering over the page, while the mind lies in torpid inactivity; they therefore compute their time, not by the hours consumed in study, but by the real acquisitions they obtain; they do not number the voyages they make, but the gold and the diamonds they bring home. A man of letters best feels the truth of the maxim of Hesiod when applied to time, that 'Half is better than the whole.' But it is a complaint of ingenious minds, that when they deviate into the gardens of Armida, they want the fortitude of Rogero to exile themselves from their enchantments. Yet works of amusement must relieve those of learning. If a student values his hours, it is therefore as dangerous for him to read romances, as it would be not to read them.

It

It is perhaps more desirable to have such literary collections at hand. Anecdotes gratify the ease of indolence by their conciseness, and the love of novelty by that infinite variety which they present to the mind. Perhaps the interest they excite is superior to that we feel in a work of imagination. It must be felt so at least by the enthusiastic votary, who approaches his masters with anxiety, with curiosity, with admiration.

What painter but must receive an exquisite gratification in this anecdote of Poussin? ‘ I saw Poussin (says Marville) during my
‘ residence at Rome. I have frequently ad-
‘ mired the excessive love this excellent
‘ painter had for the perfection of his art.
‘ Old as he then was, I have met him
‘ among the ruins of ancient Rome, and
‘ sometimes in the country, and on the bor-
‘ ders of the Tiber, sketching whatever he
‘ remarked the most to his taste. I have
‘ seen him frequently return with his hand-
‘ kerchief full of stones, moss, flowers, and
‘ similar objects, which he was desirous of
‘ painting exactly after nature. I asked him
‘ one day by what means he had attained
‘ that

excite that anxious curiosity which is the perfection of fiction. Instead of one hero, we have thus a thousand, in whose cause we equally participate.

Let us also reflect, that though such anecdotes form a source of literary amusement, they convey at the same time some of it's most valuable instructions. We learn from these anecdotes of Pouffin and of Pope, that a painter must bring home moss and flowers, and a poet sentiments and images. There is nothing so minute, that may be neglected; nothing so vast but which may escape; we must therefore habituate our mind to studious attention, as much out of our cabinet, as in it. The painter does not always require his easel to paint, nor the poet his poem to compose; their genius accompanies them in their walks, and in their conversations.

Another reflection offers itself to my mind.

The studies of artists have a great uniformity. They have all the same difficulties to encounter, though they do not all meet the same glory. It is also certain, that several men of genius have seen their labours

The instructions which an artist may derive from anecdotes.

‘ that high excellence which had placed him
 ‘ so eminently among the Italian painters;
 ‘ he answered modestly, *I have neglected*
 ‘ *nothing.*’

And what poet is not interested in this literary anecdote of a kindred nature, which Johnson has recorded of Pope? I do not venture to change his expressions: ‘ From
 ‘ his attention to poetry he was never di-
 ‘ verted. If conversation offered any thing
 ‘ that could be improved, he committed it
 ‘ to paper. If a thought, or perhaps an ex-
 ‘ pression more happy than was common,
 ‘ rose to his mind, he was careful to write
 ‘ it; an independant distich was preserved,
 ‘ for an opportunity of insertion; and some
 ‘ little fragments have been found contain-
 ‘ ing lines, or parts of lines, to be wrought
 ‘ upon at some other time.’

From these anecdotes I conclude, that a student must be more interested in what relates to a Poussin and a Pope, than to a Sir Charles Grandison and a Tom Jones. Such notices as the above, relating to illustrious characters, are so many incidents in the voluminous romance of life; and when such names are mentioned, they are sufficient to
 excite

hours neglected for their deficiency in that art of finishing, which is the excellence of art. An artist has many artifices to employ, of which, if he is ignorant, he will never attain that rank which he otherwise would merit. It is not probable that the zeal of his friends, nor even the malice of his critics, will be capable of discovering to him those mysteries of which he is ignorant, or those failings which render his attempts fruitless. Such arts of composition are alone to be attained by patient meditation on his own, and on the labours of others. It will be impossible for him to turn over a series of anecdotes, skilfully arranged, and enlightened by reflections, but he will gain some valuable intelligence which relates to his own studies. From one, he learns in what manner he corrected, and he planned; from another in what manner he overcame those obstacles, which perhaps at that very moment obstructed his progress, and made him rise in despair from his own unfinished labour. What perhaps he had in vain desired for half his life, is revealed to him by an anecdote. It is thus that the recreations of indolence may impart the vigour of

study;

study; as we find sometimes in the fruit we took for pleasure, the medicine that restores our health.

Anecdotes
of various
use to wri-
ters.

It is necessary that the mind of a writer should be richly stored with anecdotes of all kinds. The most unconnected anecdote may be advantageously employed. Anecdotes will serve to enliven his writings by a pleasing diversity; to strengthen his opinions by a happy illustration; and they will afford him a fund of ingenious allusions. I have given sufficient examples of the first kinds; I add one of the latter. In N° 172 of the Rambler, that great moralist thus expresses himself, ‘ A Virginian king, when the Europeans had fixed a lock on his door, was so delighted to find his subjects admitted or excluded with such facility, that it was from morning to evening his whole employment to turn the key. We, among whom locks and keys have been longer in use, are inclined to laugh at this American amusement; yet I doubt whether this paper will have a single reader that may not apply this story to himself, and recollect some hours of his life, in which he has been equally overpowered by the transitory
‘ charms

‘ charms of trifling novelty.’ By this anecdote of the Virginian king we may perceive in what manner the ingenuity of a writer may employ, for the happiest application, the most trifling and unconnected anecdote.

To return to the subject of anecdotes relating to literary men. There are some who appear born with an antipathy to anecdotes. They exclaim, ‘ Give me no anecdotes of an author, but give me his works.’ This contempt is erroneous, and prejudicial to literature.

One likes to know the history and the occasion of a work; and above all the character of an author. It is certain that these little circumstances serve greatly to lead us into his genius, and the proper understanding of many passages. This is very necessary in political writings, in memoirs, and such as are entitled histories of our own time. We, of all other nations, abound with party writers; and it is sometimes even necessary not only to know the *character* of an *author*, but the very *date* of his *publications*. Every true Briton is doubtless a disinterested patriot, yet he rarely appears insensible to the

Anecdotes
of an author
serve as
comments
on his
works.

offer, or the refusal of a pension; our politics are as various as our atmosphere. They are divided too into as many sects as our religion. The bigotry of toryism is seen sometimes to terminate in the atheism of whiggism. An Englishman is for saving his soul and the nation in the way that he likes best.

Anecdotes
of historical
writers very
necessary for
the reader
of their
works.

It is therefore very useful to have anecdotes of such writers. When we read Parker's History of his own Time, we cease to be surprised at seeing the celebrated Marvell treated as an outcast of society; an infamous libeller; and one whose talents were as despicable as his person. We know that this description was dictated not only by the hatred of party, but by that of personal rancour. When we read Froissart, we must not be misled by his apparent simplicity and captivating naiveté; we must remember, that he lived in our country, an adulator of Queen Philippa and the English court. When we read Comines, it will not be improper to recollect this anecdote*. This writer had been born a subject, and had been long a favourite of the Duke of Bur-

* It is to be found in Amelot de la Houssaie's *Mémoires Politiques*, but I have forgot the volume.

gundy.

gundy. Returning from the chace, he one day sat down before his prince, and jocosely ordered him to pull off his boots. It is not less unjust than dangerous, to amuse one's self with a prince. The duke pulled off his boots, and dashed them in Comines' face, which bled freely. From that time he was mortified at the court of Burgundy by the nick-name of *the booted head*. Comines felt the wound in his mind. He soon afterwards went over to the king of France. It was at that court he composed his Memoirs, in which his old patron, the Duke of Burgundy, is represented as a monster of pride, of tyranny and cruelty. I am afraid that if we closely examine into the anecdotes of the writers of memoirs, we shall find that many, like Comines, have had the boot dashed in their face.

I shall not dismiss this topic, without seizing the opportunity it affords, of disclosing to the public an anecdote which should not have been hitherto concealed from it. When some historians meet with any information in favour of those personages whom they have chosen to execrate as it were systematically, they employ forgeries, interpo-

lations, or, still more effectual villainies. Mrs. Macaulay, when she consulted the Ms. at the British Museum, was accustomed in her historical researches, when she came to any passage unfavourable to her party, or in favour of the Stuarts, to *destroy the page* of the Ms! These dilapidations were at length perceived, and she was watched. The Harleian Ms. 7379, will go down to posterity as an eternal testimony of her historical impartiality. It is a collection of state letters. This Ms. has three pages entirely torn out; and it has a note, signed by the principal librarian, that on such a day the Ms. was delivered to her, and the same day the pages were found to be *destroyed*.

Addison's
observation
on anecdotes
illustrated.

There is not less serious truth than exquisite humour, in the well-known observation with which Addison opens his Spectators. He says, 'I have observed that a reader seldom peruses a book with pleasure, until he knows whether the writer of it be a black or a fair man, of a mild or choleric disposition, with other particulars of the like nature, that conduce very much to the right understanding of an author.'

I confess I shall read the works of the
three

three great Italian writers, Dante, Petrarch, and Boccacio, with a more refined delight, since I have become acquainted with their portraits, elaborately drawn by Tiraboschi*. From this excellent writer I am informed that Dante was much given to musing, and inclined to melancholy; that he had something like pride in his nature; silent in ordinary company, but when he spoke every word was deeply thought. His conversation was as satirical concerning those he did not esteem, as it was grateful to his friends and patrons. Such was the poet of the sombrous and satiric Inferno!

He who is the model of tender sonnets, and the poet of the Loves and the Graces, was beautiful in his person, enchanting in his conversation, while his eloquence enraptured his delighted auditors. He knew to vary his employments; to fly from the court into the depth of solitude†; and it was thus that this amiable genius became as learned as he was accomplished.

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The

* See his copious History of Italian Literature,

† Zimmerman gives another turn to this continual change of place. He says, in his Solitude, 'Petrarch possessed a restless and unquiet mind; displeased because he was not
' where

The licentious writer of the most agreeable prose in Italian literature, had neither the sublime melancholy of Dante, nor the enchanting politeness of Petrarch. In the travels which, in his youthful years, he made in the character of a merchant, he had acquired his variety of knowledge of human nature, and a decided taste for that freedom of gaiety, which does not always spare the blushes of the modest, and the tremors of the pious. Love, good eating, and polite literature, were his divinities. He was big and corpulent, an able drinker, an excellent companion, and an adorer of the ladies. The priests, at length, frightened poor Boccaccio, as they afterwards did his happy disciple La Fontaine. Boccaccio suddenly became reserved, solitary, and melancholy; his studies

‘where he could not go; because he could not attain every thing he wished; because he looked in vain for something it was impossible he should find. Petrarch, in short, possessed all those defects which generally accompany men of genius.’

When we consider that he proposed to reside at Venice, and made even a present of his library to the republic, yet could not remain there above two years, with other similar resolutions, which were broken almost as soon as formed, one must prefer this opinion of Zimmerman to Tiraboschi; so difficult is it, however, to fix on the truth!

partook

partook of his dispositions, for, after his conversion, (Tiraboschi says) he produced nothing that we can read. One is inclined to lament that he became religious.

It is not amiss, when one reads the misanthropic works of Hobbes, to recollect, that the philosopher of Malmesbury wrote many of them in a manner which, perhaps, has rendered them so rugged. We are told, that soon after dinner he would retire into his study, and have his candle, with ten or twelve pipes, placed by him; then shutting the door, he began smoking, thinking, and writing. From a man who would smoke at his writings ten pipes, it was but natural they should retain something of the dull effluvia of the tobacco. Such an one might be a philosophic politician, but not a poetic philanthropist.

Yet let it not be considered, that, however sensible I may appear to the charms of striking anecdotes, I do not perceive that frequently they are frivolous, insipid, and inconsequential. Many collectors of anecdotes have shewn, by their inability, that some talents are requisite, to render them valuable; some taste in their selection,
some

A writer of
talents sees
relations in
anecdotes
not perceiv-
ed by others.

some judgment in their arrangement, and some elegance in their style. A man of penetration sees relations in anecdotes, which are not immediately perceived by others; in his hands anecdotes (even should they be familiar to us) are made susceptible of a thousand novel turns. We have only to examine the Eloges of the French academicians, composed by Fontenelle and D'Alembert, to perceive in what manner literary anecdotes should be presented, and to most of our writers to see how they should not be given.

A model of
anecdotal
composition.

As the design of this Essay is to shew in what manner any topic may be enforced, or illustrated, by anecdotes, (rather than the manner in which any single anecdote may be given) I prefer to offer, as a model of this species of anecdotal composition, some parts of the Critical Reflections on Poetry and Painting, by Du Bos. This work is familiarly known to, and ardently cherished by every man of taste, so that I shall not venture to dwell longer on it than is necessary to communicate my idea. When this ingenious reflector would establish the obser-

x

vation,

vation, that 'the impulse of genius determines those who were born with it, to become a painter or poet,' he shews, by a series of connected anecdotes, that most of the celebrated artists were never born the sons of painters *. As for poets, they are still a more striking testimony of this impulse of genius. No father ever yet designed his son to assume the profession of a poet. We cannot doubt of the truth of these observations, when we read that variety of anecdotes which he has united with such taste, and which establish the great principle of the impulse of genius. There are other sections in this delightful work, which charm and instruct us by the happy manner in which he has interwoven among his reflections, a series of interesting anecdotes.

I hasten now to conclude this Essay, by noticing, when anecdotes become frivolous and impertinent given by writers destitute of talents.

Of frivolous
anecdotes.

Dr. Johnson, who has devoted one of his periodical papers to a defence of anecdotes (some part of which has been properly quoted by Mr. Boswell) expresses himself

* Raphael, observes Du Bos, is the only exception.

thus,

thus, on certain collectors of anecdotes:
 ‘ They are not always so happy as to select
 ‘ the most important. I know not well
 ‘ what advantage posterity can receive from
 ‘ the only circumstance by which Tickell
 ‘ has distinguished *Addison* from the rest of
 ‘ mankind, the *irregularity of his pulse*; nor
 ‘ can I think myself overpaid for the time
 ‘ spent in reading the life of *Malherbe*, by
 ‘ being enabled to relate, after the learned
 ‘ biographer, that Malherbe had two predo-
 ‘ minant opinions; one, that the looseness
 ‘ of a single woman might destroy all her
 ‘ boast of ancient descent; the other, that
 ‘ the French beggars made use, very impro-
 ‘ perly and barbarously, of the phrase *noble*
 ‘ *gentleman*, because either word included the
 ‘ sense of both.’

These just observations may, perhaps, be
 further illustrated by the following notices.

An admirable writer of anecdotes (whom I
 shall not name on this occasion) has informed
 the world, that *many of our poets have been*
handsome. This, certainly, neither concerns
 the world nor their poetry. It is trifling to
 tell us, that Dr. Johnson was accustomed ‘ to
 ‘ *cut his nails to the quick*.’ It is, perhaps, ve-
 nial ;

nial; because Mr. Boswell, who gives this intelligence, must feel an interest in the minutest circumstance which related to him. I am not much gratified by being informed, that Menage wore *a greater number of stockings* than any other person, excepting one, whose name I have really forgotten. The biographer of Cujas, a celebrated lawyer, says, that *two things* were remarkable of this scholar. The *first*, that he studied on the floor, lying on his belly on a carpet, with his books about him; and, *secondly*, that his perspiration exhaled an agreeable smell, which he used to inform his friends he had in common with Alexander the Great! This admirable biographer should have told us, if he frequently turned from his very uneasy attitude. Somebody informs us, that Guy Patin resembled Cicero, whose statue is preserved at Rome; on which he enters into a comparison of Patin with Cicero. He should have recollected, that he might have resembled the *statue* of Cicero, but not Cicero himself. Baillet loads his life of Descartes with a thousand minutiae, which less disgrace the philosopher than the biographer.

biographer. Was it worth while informing the public, that Descartes was very particular about his wigs; that he had them manufactured at Paris; and that he always kept four? That he wore green taffety in France; but that, in Holland, he quitted taffety for cloth; and that he was fond of omelets of eggs? There are writers who cannot distinguish between such frivolous particulars, and those anecdotes which convey some striking sentiment, characteristic of a sublime genius. It must also be confessed, that there are readers, who, when they meet with interesting anecdotes of illustrious men, rank them with such frivolous particulars.

Trifling anecdotes
sometimes
to be excused.

Yet of anecdotes which appear trifling, something may be alledged in their defence. It is certainly safest, for *some* writers, to give us all they know, than to permit themselves the power of rejection; because, for this, there requires a certain degree of taste and discernment, which many biographers are not so fortunate as to possess. Let us sometimes recollect, that the page over which we toil, will probably furnish materials for authors of happier talents. I would rather have

have a Birch, or a Hawkins, appear heavy, cold, and prolix, than that any thing which concerns a Tillotson or a Johnson should be lost. It must also be confessed, that an anecdote, or a circumstance, which may appear inconsequential to a reader, may bear some remote or latent connection, which a mature reflection often discovers. It is certain, that a biographer, who has long contemplated the character he records, sees many relations which escape an ordinary reader. On this subject I shall quote the judicious observation of Dr. Kippis; a writer to whom English literature owes much, and whose life is precious to every man of letters. Our biographer, in closing the life of Dr. Birch, has formed an apology for that minute research, which, it is said, this writer has carried to a blameable excess. He writes, ‘ It may be alledged in our author’s
‘ favour, that a man who has a deep and ex-
‘ tensive acquaintance with a subject, often
‘ sees a connection and importance in some
‘ smaller circumstances, which may not im-
‘ mediately be discerned by others; and, on
‘ that account, may have reasons for inserting
‘ them

‘ them that will escape the notice of superficial minds *.’

Character
of a writer
of anecdotes.

I shall now close this Dissertation, by attempting to sketch the character of a writer of anecdotes.

To collect anecdotes, is the humble labour of industry ; but not to present them with reflection, with acumen, and with taste.

It is a task, not unworthy of genius, to arrange these minute notices of human na-

* Abbé d'Olivet has been censured for dwelling, in his Continuation of the History of the French Academy, on minute circumstances, unworthy of the dignity of the historian. Perhaps it was unfortunate for our abbé, that his predecessor Fontenelle so eminently distinguished himself in the same career. In a letter which he wrote some time after his work was published, he gives his opinion on these minutiae of literary history. He says, ‘ For my part, I should be charmed if we had a good life of Homer, of Plato, of Horace, of Virgil, and their equals. It is in these cases the minutest details would not fail to interest me ; but I would not give a straw to know the year of Rome in which Bavius was born, who were his father, his mother, his nurse, and his preceptor ; the number of his brothers and sisters, nor the year and the day in which he died.’ I must confess, in closing this note, that a warm admirer of any great man never finds any thing uninteresting which relates to him ; but some biographers do not recollect, that the lives they record are not always those which enjoy this privilege.

ture,

ture, and of human learning. A writer might yet delight us, by a collection of topics which should illustrate manners, history, and literature: his talents must be versatile, yet powerful. A writer of anecdotes has difficulties to encounter, from which the biographer is exempt. A biographer has but the peculiarities of an individual to seize; he has only to assimilate his genius to that of another person. He plays but with one ball, and practice will teach his hand to grasp it with adroitness: a writer of anecdotes throws with several. It becomes necessary for such an one to render himself familiar with the multiform shapes of nature herself. Is such a writer to give anecdotes of a Gray, a Milton, or a Sterne? his soul must be softened with the querulous melancholy of Gray; austere with the republican fierceness of Milton; and varied with the gaiety and the pathos of Sterne. Anecdotes are but squalid skeletons, unless they are full of the blood and flesh of reflection. If our writer does not feel with the sensibility of taste, his reflections may be just, but triyial; his style must be diversified by the variety of passion; he must

know to mourn and to rejoice. Does he present the anecdotes of war, of persecution, of superstition—his periods must assume a higher tone; his sentiments must overflow his facts; and his heart must be more occupied than his memory. Does he give the anecdotes of conviviality, of wit, and of criticism—his style must be sharp with epigrammatic pungency, or embellished with a thousand graces *. He is no inferior artist who must occasionally alarm with the terrifying sublimity of an Angelo, or enchant with the softened beauty of an Albano.

A writer of anecdotes should write of eminent characters, as they would themselves have written of others. He must therefore possess a portion of that genius which he records.

If I have not raised the character of such an author to an unnecessary and imaginary perfection, our writers of anecdotes have yet an excellence to attain.

† This art is what has been so justly admired in Fontenelle's *Eloges* of the Academicians. Every one is treated in a style conformable to the object in which he excelled. The genius of Fontenelle discloses that of an astronomer, a physician, a moralist, a geometrician, and a poet, as if either of these professions had formed the studies of his life.

That

That cannot be imaginary, which has been already effected; nor unnecessary, which adds new gratifications to a refined taste. I have already mentioned, as models in the art of anecdotal composition, the illustrious names of Fontenelle, D'Alembert, and Du Bos. I have been compelled, on this occasion, to cite the literature of a rival nation. Yet, if our writers of anecdotes could unite the various learning of Dr. Warton to his fine taste, his exact judgment, and his exquisite art of introducing anecdote, we perhaps might have writers who were worthy of being classed in the rank of the Fontenelles,

F I N I S.

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